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Partners with God: A Celebration of Human Sexuality

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In spite of these positive features, it is also important to note some of the book's limitations. The inclusion of the United States documentation, though perhaps justified by Orbis being an American press, reduces the genuinely catholic character of the book. Where are the other, equally or even more important, social documents of the church? Surely Medellín and Puebla produced materials more earth-shattering within Catholicism than those by the U.S. bishops. Indeed, the Dutch, the French and the Canadian episcopate created letters similar to the American ones and did so in advance of the latter. Of course, no one book can include all the pertinent documentation, and choices must be made. Nonetheless, the book's subtitle *The Documentary Heritage* is misleading. It would have been far better to include solely papal documents or an excerpted section showing the wide range of episcopal social documents. Otherwise call the book *A Documentary Sampling* or *The United States Perspective*. The book is to be commended for its willingness to be more critical of papal insights than previous works, yet there seems to be also an ideological thread holding the book's commentary together. To this reviewer, this ideology appears to be predominantly liberal, middle class and American, and in that sense, it has both strengths and limitations.

By way of conclusion I would reiterate the high quality of this collection above its English language predecessors, while at the same time, I would urge all readers of both the documents and the commentary to avail themselves of critical tools in their reflection upon what they read. An excellent companion for that latter task is the fine work of M.-D. Chenu entitled *La "Doctrine sociale" de l'Église comme idéologie* (1979).

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Partners with God: A Celebration of Human Sexuality

David Thomas
Winfield, BC: Wood Lake Books, Inc., 1988
95 pages \$10.95

The discussion of sexuality raises the anxiety level for many, especially when the discussion takes place within the church. David Thomas, an Anglican priest, facilitates that discussion in this book by providing an approach to the subject which emphasizes sexuality as a gift from God, a gift which, when used with care and respect, can bring deep pleasure and satisfaction. His positive approach to sexuality is stated very clearly in the title of his book, *Partners with God: A Celebration of Human Sexuality*.

Drawing on the Song of Songs, Thomas points out that love-making freely accepted and given with tenderness, approaches a spiritual union

which is of the very nature of God. While emphasizing the beauty and joy of sexuality, however, Thomas is not oblivious to the pain and the hurt which can be caused when sexuality is misused and is treated as a right rather than God's precious gift to humankind. Thomas leads the reader to see that sexuality in itself is not evil, but that it is the abuse and misuse of sexuality which leads to destructive behaviour and pain.

In addition to celebrating the gift of human sexuality, Thomas is also ready to deal with the issue of homosexuality which has been the subject of much discussion within church circles. He takes a very caring, sensitive approach to this issue, calling upon the Christian community to display an extraordinary gentleness. In the end he writes, "Such a charitable attitude neither approves nor encourages homosexuality. It does however recognize the creative diversity in which God has formed us." No doubt, there will be those who will accuse Thomas of not taking a definitive stand on the issue. His concern, however, is to approach the homosexual with love and understanding and unjudging acceptance as he sees it expressed in the ministry of Christ.

Thomas takes a swipe at the Roman Catholic Church for its position on contraception and charges that it makes "the body of a dutiful woman a scourge when it ought to be an instrument of her joy." While admitting that the possibility of sexual relations with no strings attached can lead to a hedonistic pursuit of gratification, he is quick to point out that when "used with the selflessness of love and in a caring quest for tenderness, it can bring two lovers close to a unique knowing of God."

The format of the book encourages its use in discussion groups. Each page includes several provocative and stimulating questions in the margin. Divided into seven chapters, none of which is more than 20 pages in length, this book could provide material for young adult or adult groups interested in meeting for a series of discussions over a number of weeks. The chapter titles indicate the positive approach taken by Thomas toward the topic of sexuality: "the joy of sexuality", "the joy of partnership", "the joy of making love", "the agony of ignorance", "the pain of a different joy", "the joy of caring", and "the joy of celebration". Those who have given careful thought to the subject of sexuality in the context of Christian theology and ethics probably will not find many new and profound insights in Thomas' book, but they will find a strong call to view the subject with sensitivity and compassion. For those who are just beginning to wrestle with the issues, this book could serve as a fine point from which to begin.

Angela Thomas, the author's daughter, complements the text with illustrations that are, at one and the same time, sensitive and sensual.

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